

Immigration Strategy in Lane-Duck

Settles on DREAM Act Push

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(Washington, DC) – *The following is a statement by Rep. Luis V. Gutierrez (D-IL), who met with President Barack Obama today at the White House to discuss immigration reform and the lame-duck session of Congress.*

When I met with the President today, I told him that we need him to join us in fighting for the DREAM Act. I told the President we need him now and that we cannot waste another day and must push for a DREAM Act vote in the House and Senate during the lame-duck. It is not the time to hesitate or be unclear about what we are fighting for. We need the DREAM Act. I see it as a down payment on comprehensive reform and we will continue working towards comprehensive immigration reform today, tomorrow, and until it passes. But I will not pass up the chance to save a million or more children who grew up in the U.S., who know no other country, and who are threatened with deportation unless we act.

With the White House, Majority Leader Harry Reid, Speaker Nancy Pelosi and every Democratic Leader in the House and Senate pulling in the same direction, we can pass the DREAM Act before the end of the 111th Congress. Speaker Pelosi has indicated to me personally that she wants the House to move on the DREAM Act. Majority Leader Harry Reid has consistently supported a DREAM Act vote during lame-duck, and now the President and I have had an opportunity to discuss the lame-duck strategy.

By passing the DREAM Act, we have an opportunity during this lame-duck session to make a down payment on the immigration reform voters want, our country deserves, and our leaders have promised. We need a clear Democratic commitment in order to persuade Republicans -- who are needed to get us over the finish line -- to step forward.

There is a chance to pass the Dream Act if lawmakers and supporters work together across party lines in the weeks ahead. We must show a singular unity of purpose to get this bill to a vote in both chambers to demonstrate that we can put sensible policy ahead of divisive politics. Democrats and those Republicans willing to join us to address an important area of our dysfunctional immigration system can set the tone for the next Congress and the next two years. The DREAM Act is only a first step, but it is an important one in both practical and political terms.

Passage of the DREAM Act is achievable right now. It is the only piece of immigration reform legislation that can get broad support from Democrats and has attracted significant Republican support in the recent past. The policy of mass deportation is not working and is ripping apart communities and may only get worse under a Republican controlled House. We cannot squander this opportunity to save a million kids.

Obviously, I would prefer that we were talking about comprehensive immigration reform. Only a comprehensive bill will fix our broken immigration system, secure the border, and establish the rule of law. There is no other way. We have to have a functioning legal immigration system and eliminate the pool of immigrants in the U.S. illegally in order to significantly improve security and put our workforce on a stable footing where labor laws are evenly enforced. But in the short-run, the battle is for passage of the DREAM Act. Not some valiant good-faith effort to check a political box, but passage in the House and the Senate and a signature from the President.

Support for sensible immigration reform and rejecting the politics of demonization was a winning

strategy for Democrats on Election Day. Three U.S. Senators -- Senators Reid, Barbara Boxer, and Michael Bennet -- and many other Democratic candidates in state and federal races, owe their jobs to the support of Latino and immigrant voters who helped fight back against anti-reform politicians whose messages were often ugly and divisive.

The bipartisan coalition of lawmakers that once stood strong for comprehensive immigration reform and those who have voted for the DREAM Act or pledged to do so should be given the opportunity to vote for the DREAM Act on its own merits.

Just this morning, I met with some young organizers and students from California and they told me that if this President is willing to fight for them, they are willing to fight for him. They told me that their undocumented classmates, siblings, and friends don't have the luxury of giving up saying "I'm tired of fighting" or "it's too hard." They must keep fighting and I told the President you want them to be fighting for you.

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